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PART ONE

## PREFACE

We felt it valuable to begin this study with three very important pieces of A.A. literature: An excerpt from page 568 of the Fourth Edition, the Forward to the First Edition, and the Doctor's Opinion (First Edition). These pages are broken down in the same manner as the entire Fat Book, in hopes of bringing deeper insight and context to the beliefs and experiences of the founders of Alcoholics Anonymous.

The below excerpt is from page 568 of the Fourth Edition (also found on page 568 or 570 of the Second and Third Editions).

An excerpt from Page 568 (Fourth Edition)

- 568:1 Most **emphatically** we wish to say that any alcoholic capable of honestly facing his problems in the light of our experience can **recover, provided** he does not close his mind to all spiritual concepts.<sup>1</sup> He can only be defeated by an attitude of intolerance or **belligerent** denial.
- 568:2 We find that no one need have difficulty with the spirituality of the program. *Willingness, honesty and open mindedness are the **essentials** of recovery. But these are indispensable.*
- 568:3 “There is a principle which is a bar against all information, which is proof against all arguments and which cannot fail to keep a man in **everlasting ignorance**—that principle is contempt prior to investigation.”<sup>2</sup>

—**HERBERT SPENCER**<sup>2</sup>  
William Paley

I start with these two paragraphs to lay the groundwork for what is needed *if* you desire to learn from this book.

**Emphatically:** forcefully without any doubt; clear

**Recover:** be restored to health

**Provided:** a condition to understand (Synonym: IF)

**All:** The founder had knowledge of many religions. *See Dr. Bob's Reading List, p. 302; pages 96 and 309-310 of Dr. Bob & the Good Oldtimers, pp. 308, 310.*

**Belligerent:** war-like

**Essentials:** What we cannot do without (in A.A. the essentials are honesty, open-mindedness and willingness — the H.O.W.).

**Everlasting:** always

**Ignorance:** unaware of the facts

## INSIGHT

<sup>1</sup> This is a description of how we become or are already closed-minded. In early sobriety, we refuse to investigate facts.

<sup>2</sup> This quote is incorrectly credited to Herbert Spencer. It was first written by William Paley in 1794 in his book, *A View of the Evidences of Christianity*. It was subsequently miscredited in the story “An Artist's Concept” in the Big Book First Edition and remains miscredited to this day. *Visit fatbook.org, Personal Stories: An Artists Concept.*

- For more about what the founders read and said about the foundation of the program, reference the Learning Pages beginning on page 217, as well as Dr. Bob's Reading List on page 302. These readings will give a picture of the founder's common beliefs.

- The Steps: (1) Admit; (2) Believe; (3) Decide; (4-12) Action.

**1 John 2:27** (p. 326); **Acts 17:22-28** (p. 334); **Matthew 13:18-23** (p. 358)

## FOREWORD TO FIRST EDITION

*This is the Foreword as it appeared in the first printing of the first edition in 1939*

- xiii:1 **W**E, OF Alcoholics Anonymous, are more than one hundred men and women who have **recovered** from a seemingly hopeless state of mind and body.<sup>1</sup> To show other alcoholics **precisely** how we have **recovered** is the main purpose of this book.<sup>2</sup> For them, we hope these pages will **prove** so convincing that no further **authentication** will be necessary. We think this account of our experiences will help everyone to better understand the alcoholic. Many do not comprehend that the alcoholic is a very sick person. And besides, we are sure that **our way of living** has its advantages for **all**.
- xiii:2 It is important that we remain anonymous because we are too few, at present to handle the overwhelming number of personal appeals which may result from this publication. Being mostly business or professional folk, we could not well carry on our occupations in such an event. We would like it understood that our alcoholic work is an **avocation**.
- xiii:3 When writing or speaking publicly about alcoholism, we urge each of our Fellowship to omit his personal name, designating himself instead as "a member of Alcoholics Anonymous."<sup>3</sup>
- xiii:4 Very earnestly we ask the press also, to observe this request, for otherwise we shall be greatly handicapped.
- xiii:5 We are not an organization in the conventional

The founding 100 members of A.A. believed that they had been completely restored to health. They did not live "in recovery." They *recovered*. They discovered God's plan for their lives and they *lived!* There has been a fundamental shift in modern A.A. away from the one true God and toward any higher power you choose to put your faith in. But the founders knew the God of the Good Book was and is the only Power who can heal you. And He wants to! He is waiting for you to seek Him.

**Recovered:** to restore to health; to be free

**Precisely:** Pages xiii–164 are EXACT directions about how to recover.

**Prove:** provide evidence

**Authentication:** the action of verifying; This is not a fiction book.

**Our way of living:** to seek God and help others

**All:** Everyone needs God's power and plan in their lives.

**Avocation:** A labor of love. We help others because we come to love doing it. The founder loved sharing the message contained in this book.

## INSIGHT

<sup>1</sup> This is the state you have been living in — unable to stop drinking; hopeless.

<sup>2</sup> This book was written to provide the path of recovery and to show the lives of the recovered.

<sup>3</sup> Early A.A.'s believed, and rightfully so, that God had completely healed them. In the first edition, they referred to themselves as "ex-alcoholics." This has been changed in later editions to read "ex-problem drinkers." See xxvi:3, 18:4, 20:0, 151:3; 252.

xiv:0 sense of the word. There are no fees or dues whatsoever. The only requirement for **membership** is an honest desire to stop drinking. We are not **allied** with any particular **faith**, **sect** or **denomination**, nor do we oppose anyone. We simply wish to be helpful to those who are afflicted.

xiv:1 We shall be interested to hear from those who are getting results from this book, particularly from those who have commenced work with other alcoholics.<sup>1</sup> We should like to be helpful to such cases.

xiv:2 Inquiry by scientific, medical, and religious societies will be welcomed.

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS.

The only requirement is a desire to stop drinking. Membership does not mean that you recover by joining A.A. You may consider following the PRECISE directions described in this book to receive what early A.A.'s discovered, believed, and received by remaining open-minded.

**Membership:** does not mean “recovered”

**Allied:** having or being in close association (*Merriam-Webster*)

**Faith:** belief in God in the doctrines of religion (*Merriam-Webster*)

**Sect:** a Christian denomination characterized by strict qualification

for membership (*Merriam-Webster*)

**Denomination:** a religious group, usually including many local churches (*Merriam-Webster*)

#### INSIGHT

<sup>1</sup> Read this book, ask to receive God's power, and do what it says by helping others to discover God and recover.

- A.A. is allied to the one true God. If you continue this process, Bill Wilson says He will become “the God of your understanding,” and you “would presently love God and call Him by NAME.” See *page 109 of 12 Steps & 12 Traditions (12 & 12), p. 314.*

- Not all members have recovered. The bar for membership is low whereas to recover requires much more. Remember, this book is a precise instruction on how to recover. See *page 145 of 12 & 12, p. 314.*

- God knows who He is! You don't have to know who He is yet. Your job is to *seek* Him and He will reveal himself to you in a way that you can understand.

**1 John 2:27** (*p. 326*); **Jeremiah 29:12-13** (*p. 346*)

## PERSONAL STORIES

The value and insight found in the original stories is pertinent to understanding what made A.A. successful in the first place, as the stories give a particular witness of God and how He disclosed himself to the early members who recovered from alcoholism and went on to lead normal lives. Here you will find three of the original 29 stories as well as the author's personal journey to sobriety entitled "The Way Out." An additional 20 of the original 29 stories can be found online at [fatbook.org](http://fatbook.org).

*"Clear-cut directions are given showing how we recovered. These are followed by more than a score of personal experiences."*

*See 29:1*

*"Each individual, in the personal stories, describes in his own language and from his own point of view the way he established his relationship with God."*

*See 29:2*

## ADDITIONAL PERSONAL STORIES

This printing includes three of the original 29 personal stories. We encourage you to read these additional personal stories online at [fatbook.org](http://fatbook.org).

THE UNBELIEVER, by Hank Parkhurst

VICIOUS CYCLE, by Jim Burwell

OUR SOUTHERN FRIEND, by Fitz Mayo

HOME BREWMIESTER, by Clarence Snyder

THE SEVENTH-MONTH SLIP, by Ernie Galbraith

LONE ENDEAVOR, by Pat Cooper

THE EUROPEAN DRINKER, by Joe Doepler

A FEMININE VICTORY, by Florence Rankin

BUSINESSMAN'S RECOVERY, by Bill Ruddell

TRAVELER, EDITOR, SCHOLAR, by Jim Scott

THE BACK-SLIDER, by Walter Bray

MY WIFE AND I, by Maybelle and Tom Lucas

THE WARD OF THE PROBATE COURT, by Bill Van Horn

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SMILE WITH ME, AT ME, by Harold Sears

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## CHARACTERISTICS OF A REAL ALCOHOLIC

(pp. 21, 30, 31, 32, 36, 40, 89, 90, 95, 107, 110, 139, 155, 156)

**1. Physical allergy:** “We believe, and so suggested a few years ago, that the action of alcohol on these chronic alcoholics is a manifestation of an allergy; that the phenomenon of craving is limited to this class and never occurs in the average temperate drinker. These allergic types can never safely use alcohol in any form at all; and once having formed the habit and found they cannot break it, once having lost their self-confidence, their reliance upon things human, their problems pile up on them and become astonishingly difficult to solve.” (p. xxviii:1)

**2. Phenomenon of craving:** “All these, and many others, have one symptom in common: they cannot start drinking without developing the phenomenon of craving. This phenomenon, as we have suggested, may be the manifestation of an allergy which differentiates these people, and sets them apart as a distinct entity. It has never been, by any treatment with which we are familiar, permanently eradicated. The only relief we have to suggest is entire abstinence.” (p. xxx:5)

**3. Obsession to control liquor:** “Most of us have been unwilling to admit we were real alcoholics. No person likes to think he is bodily and mentally different from his fellows. Therefore, it is not surprising that our drinking careers have been characterized by countless vain attempts to prove we could drink like other people. The idea that somehow, someday he will control and enjoy his liquor drinking is the great obsession of every abnormal drinker. The persistence of this illusion is astonishing. Many pursue it into the gates of insanity or death.” (p. 30:1)

**4. Strange mental blank spot or spiritual malady:** “The fact is that most alcoholics, for reasons yet obscure, have lost the power of choice in drink. Our so-called will power becomes practically nonexistent. We are unable, at certain times, to bring into our consciousness with sufficient force the memory of the suffering and humiliation of even a week or a month ago. We are without defense against the first drink.” (p. 24:1)

“I had commenced to drink as carelessly as though the cocktails were ginger ale. I now remembered what my alcoholic friends had told me, how they prophesied that if I had an alcoholic mind, the time and place would come—I would drink again. They had said that though I did raise a defense, it would one day give way before some trivial reason for having a drink. Well, just that did happen and more, for what I had learned of alcoholism did not occur to me at all. I knew from that moment that I had an alcoholic mind. I saw that will power and self-knowledge would not help in those strange mental blank spots. I had never been able to understand people who said that a problem had them hopelessly defeated. I knew then. It was a crushing blow.” (pp. 41:2-42:0)

“Resentment is the “number one” offender. It destroys more alcoholics than anything else. From it stem all forms of spiritual disease, for we have been not only mentally and physically ill; we have been spiritually sick. When the spiritual malady is overcome, we straighten out mentally and physically.” (p. 64:3)

“If you are satisfied that he is a real alcoholic, begin to dwell on the hopeless feature of the malady. Show him, from your own experience, how the queer mental condition surrounding that first drink prevents normal functioning of the willpower. Don’t, at this stage, refer to this book, unless he has seen it and wishes to discuss it. And be careful not to brand him an alcoholic. Let him draw his own conclusion. If he sticks to the idea that he can still control his drinking, tell him that possibly he can—if he is not too alcoholic. But insist that, if he is severely afflicted, there may be little chance he can recover by himself. (p. 92:1)

## THE STRANGE MENTAL BLANK SPOT

(pp. 1, 5, 6, 8, 21, 24, 31, 33, 37, 40, 42, 92, 107, 138, 152, 155, 157)

*“When the spiritual malady is overcome, we straighten out mentally and physically” p. 64:3*

The strange mental blank spot is what separates the “real alcoholic” from all other types of drinkers (pp. 20-24). It is the evidence that the spiritual malady or spiritual death has occurred. In section 151:2, Bill uses the four horsemen of the apocalypse to describe this type of malady or death. But why does this malady or death create an inability to remember what happened the last time we drank?

Let’s start with what the Bible teaches. In the book of Romans, we are told that “the wages of sin is death” (see *Romans 6:23, p. 366; and pp. 11:2 & 13:2*). Sin (pp. 258-260) is anything we think, say, or do that separates us from God — knowingly or unknowingly. By the end of our drinking career, we are completely separated from God or “dead.” Our drinking pattern has become gluttonous (see pp. 66, 314) which simply means that we have learned to use alcohol to change the way we feel, rather than turning to God for comfort and direction. Alternatively, we may be completely indifferent to God and therefore, when tempted we have no divine inspiration (see p. 256) to keep us from the drink. We cannot recall in a moment of temptation or “trivial reason to drink” what happened the last time we drank. We have become slaves to temptation (see p. 259). The liar or “disease” if you prefer, whispers and we react. That reaction is the first drink, setting into motion the allergic cycle once again. Read through the Steps by the Book (p. 280). The excerpts on the following page are how Bill W. described it throughout the Big Book.

I was part of life at last, and in the midst of the excitement I discovered liquor. I forgot the strong warnings and the prejudices of my people concerning drink. (p. 1:1)

Shortly afterward I came home drunk. There had been no fight. Where had been my high resolve? I simply didn’t know. It hadn’t even come to mind. Someone had pushed a drink my way, and I had taken it. Was I crazy? (p. 5:5)

Trembling, I stepped from the hospital a broken man. Fear sobered me for a bit. Then came the insidious insanity of that first drink, and on Armistice Day 1934, I was off again. (p. 8:2)

The fact is that most alcoholics, for reasons yet obscure, have lost the power of choice in drink. Our so-called will power becomes practically nonexistent. We are unable, at certain times, to bring into our consciousness with sufficient force the memory of the suffering and humiliation of even a week or a month ago. We are without defense against the first drink. (p. 24:1)

They had said that though I did raise a defense, it would one day give way before some trivial reason for having a drink. Well, just that did happen and more, for what I had learned of alcoholism did not occur to me at all. I knew from that moment that I had an alcoholic mind. I saw that will power and self-knowledge would not help in those **strange mental blank spots**. (p. 42:0)

If you are satisfied that he is a real alcoholic, begin to dwell on the hopeless feature of the malady. Show him, from your own experience, how the queer mental condition surrounding that first drink prevents normal functioning of the will power. (p. 92:1)

The man in the bed was told of the acute poisoning from which he suffered, how it deteriorates the body of an alcoholic and warps his mind. There was much talk about the mental state preceding the first drink. (p. 157:5)

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**1:18** The message of the cross is foolish to those who are headed for destruction! But we who are being saved know it is the very power of God. NLT (p. 141)

**2:9-12** That is what the Scriptures mean when they say, “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him.”<sup>10</sup> But it was to us that God revealed these things by his Spirit. For his Spirit searches out everything and shows us God’s deep secrets.<sup>11</sup> No one can know a person’s thoughts except that person’s own spirit, and no one can know God’s thoughts except God’s own Spirit.<sup>12</sup> And we have received God’s Spirit (not the world’s spirit), so we can know the wonderful things God has freely given us. NLT (pp. 53, 117)

**2:14** The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit. NIV (pp. 53, 96, 141)

**6:12** I can do anything I want to if Christ has not said no, but some of these things aren’t good for me. Even if I am allowed to do them, I’ll refuse to if I think they might get such a grip on me that I can’t easily stop when I want to. TLB (pp. xxix, 26, 29, 30, 42, 109, 110, 115)

**9:19** Even though I am a free man with no master, I have become a slave to all people to bring many to Christ. NLT (p. 156)

**9:22** When I am with those who are weak, I share their weakness, for I want to bring the weak to Christ. Yes, I try to find common ground with everyone, doing everything I can to save some. NLT (p. 92)

**10:12-13** If you think you are standing strong, be careful not to fall.<sup>13</sup> The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are

tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure. NLT (pp. 59, 72, 123)

**12:12-13** The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ.<sup>13</sup> Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free. But we have all been baptized into one body by one Spirit, and we all share the same Spirit. NLT (p. 18)

**Ch. 13** Entire chapter can be found on page 544.

**13:1-8** If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels, but didn’t love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.<sup>2</sup> If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God’s secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn’t love others, I would be nothing.<sup>3</sup> If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn’t love others, I would have gained nothing.

<sup>4</sup> Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud<sup>5</sup> or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged.<sup>6</sup> It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out.<sup>7</sup> Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

<sup>8</sup> Prophecy and speaking in unknown languages and special knowledge will become useless. But love will last forever! NLT (pp. 79, 83, 104, 118)

**14:33** For God is not a God of disorder but of peace, as in all the meetings of God’s holy people. NLT (p. 115)

**15:1-7** Let me now remind you, dear brothers and sisters, of the Good News I preached to you before. You welcomed it then, and you still stand firm in it.<sup>2</sup> It is this Good News that saves you if you continue to believe the message I told you—unless, of